

April 17th, 2021

To: The Joint Committee on Ways and Means
From: Joslyn Walker
Re: Childcare funding and support of HB 3073

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward, and Rayfield; and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joslyn Walker and I live in Bend, Oregon.

June 2020: Since moving to Bend, OR in 2015, the cost of childcare has always seemed like an issue in Central Oregon. But it wasn't until 2019 that I felt the personal struggle of this issue. It was the main determining factor as to why I left my position as a K-5 reading specialist last summer. I just couldn't justify the cost of childcare anymore. It felt like I was working just to put my son in daycare. Without having family here to help offset the financial burden, I felt forced out of my passion for teaching. But I knew I wasn't alone in feeling this. I knew that there had to be other families and moms feeling the same tension with this sort of financial decision making.

In late 2019, I met a few of these moms. These moms felt the childcare struggle as hard if not harder than I did. After many conversations, it was clear that in order for some of these families to continue to provide for their families, they couldn't afford daycare any longer. In January 2020, these determined mamas and myself came up with a plan. This plan would involve sharing the work of "villaging" our children. We came up with ReVillage Cooperative and Coworking.

ReVillage takes place at church nurseries around Bend, Or. We are a nurturing, relationship-centered childcare and co-working cooperative that utilizes the care and skills of parents and community volunteers to create affordable childcare and access to low-cost co-working/professional space. Our program soon took off and has grown out of community organizing efforts to provide an affordable alternative to full-time/market-rate childcare, and co-working spaces. Basically, you give a day of childcare and receive the rest of the week with free childcare. Our committed families are what will keep us going! We were helping 7 families with free to low cost childcare.

As ReVillage's coordinator, I was crushed to hear we had to close due to COVID-19, but knew it was for the health and safety of our families. Thinking it was temporary, some families took some time off to stay home with their kids. That was in March. Here we are at the end of June, with the need to continue helping our families with their childcare needs, but there is still no end in sight. Because we operated out of church nurseries, we do not have the funding to move ReVillage to another open location at this time. These families that depended on this free to low cost childcare co-op movement are being forced to quit their jobs. One mom had to sell her home and is now living out of an RV. These families don't have the means to spend their last paycheck on childcare. They need this option. We need to provide them with this option. We need more support to make this happen.

April 2021 update:

ReVillage has been able to partner with Neighbor Impact's program Baby Promise which supports 6 child care slots out of 10 for ReVillage families. That means 6 families that qualify for Baby Promise will not pay for childcare. Baby Promise will pay those ReVillage families tuition for those 6 slots and make it possible to have a quality childcare program with increased staff wages and retain high quality educators. With the extra funds from Baby Promise, we are able to offer a much lower tuition to the other families of ReVillage as well.

However, the Baby Promise program is only offering 109 slots for the entire central Oregon area for 12 months. This is not nearly enough, so we need programs like ERDC to supplement it. We are so fortunate to have been able to receive 6 of those slots and are hopeful that funding for Baby Promise can continue so that we are able to offer affordable, high quality child care. Ideally, Baby Promise would have the funding to have unlimited spots & all families could be Baby Promise families making quality care accessible for all! In addition, establishing the new Early Learning Authority will help streamline both these programs, making quality care more accessible to families state-wide. That's why I'm urging the Committee to fully fund the ERDC and HB 3073.

Sincerely,

Joslyn Walker